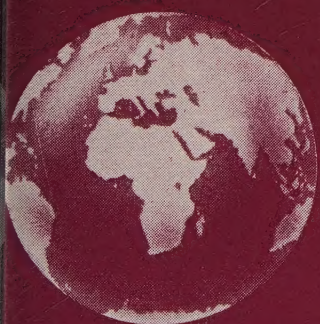


Light...



....ON A NEW WORLD

*Published for the Bexley Christadelphian Ecclesia
by 'The Dawn' Book Supply, 17 Leegate,
London, SE12 8SS, England*

SECRETARY TO THE EDITORIAL PANEL
AND
CORRESPONDENCE EDITOR

*David Evans, 57 Longmead Drive,
Sidcup, Kent, DA14 4NT, England*

VOLUME EIGHT

NUMBER 4

MARCH/APRIL 1984

CONTENTS

Basic Bible teaching about God (1)	page 1
The books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth	page 5
The parable of the leaven	page 11
Bible reading tables	page 16

Basic Bible teaching about God (1)

IN A WORD, the Bible teaches us that God **exists**. In just under a million words, it teaches why it is important for us to **know** Him.

The very first verse in the Bible declares God to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth. It might be well to think about this statement for a moment because, as we know, the idea of a Supreme, All-wise, All-powerful God has been more or less discredited by many people during the past hundred years or so. Men of scientific reputation have vigorously advanced the idea that all the matter in the universe was once compressed into a single huge mass. An explosion, which they call the 'big bang', supposedly sent fragments flying at incredible speeds in all directions. This, so they claim, is how the universe was formed. Others have maintained that through 'blind chance' life spontaneously appeared upon this earth and, by the process of evolution, working over millions of years, man was at last brought into existence.

All, however, has not been sweet harmony in scientific circles because other scientists of equal reputation have been violently opposed to these theories and have not been slow to voice their objections by pointing to serious flaws in each of these concepts.

IMPORTANCE OF STARTING CORRECTLY

We mention these things for two reasons. Firstly, because it is extremely important to our subject that we start *correctly*. Secondly, it was most interesting to read recently that after all these years of scholastic acclaim, the 'big bang' theory might be discarded as an unsatisfactory explanation of the origin of the universe. The weight of accumulating evidence points to concentrated *energy* as the source of all matter! Certainly this premise, say the cosmologists, more satisfactorily explains the extraordinary uniformity of the universe—its uniform expansion and its initial uniformity of expansion. This is now quite in harmony with the generally accepted theory regarding the relationship of energy to mass and the speed of light ($E=mc^2$), and brings us close indeed to the Bible teaching concerning God as the great Architect and Builder

of the universe—the Designer and Sustainer of those unnumbered manifestations of His Wisdom, especially as we see them so marvellously displayed in the starry canopy above and in the earth upon which we live.

GOD THE CREATOR

The universe was not made out of nothing. Life did not appear upon the earth spontaneously and then blossom into such incredible sophistications by mere random selection and the precarious art of survival. God, who was equal in wisdom and power for the task of creation, commanded and it was done.¹ How long ago this 'beginning' was is not stated and it is really not important for us to know. What is important is the story of the earth's renovation.² God proposed to fashion a suitable habitation for man whom He intended to create from the earth's composition and to surround with a flourishing climate in which all the associated forms of living plants and animals would complete his initial environment.

If God created all things, including man, the large question before us is, Why? Why all this stupendous expenditure of energy? Why all this unbelievable attention to the smallest detail of certain fundamental laws, so that everything would function in perfect harmony? Why the uniqueness of this planet, and the bewildering array of living things, each one a marvel of omniscience and omnipotence? Why this 'moral law' which has persistently hovered over the human race—so contrary to our natural inclinations and so foreign to the idea that only the fittest should survive? The answers to these questions constitute the central theme of the basic teaching concerning God found in the Bible.

GOD A REVEALER

God is a Creator, but He is also a Revealer. He has been gracious to reveal certain facts about Himself and His purpose with the earth. Men from time to time were selected to write as they were Divinely directed,³ and the accumulation of their writings makes up what we call the Bible. What we are taught about God in this collection of writings comes in two main forms. Firstly, there are direct statements giving us to understand who and what God is. Secondly, there is a progressive, sometimes detailed history of how God has dealt with men and nations in the past. These accounts there is the announcement and gradual development of God's intention with the earth, but, equally as important, there is also an insight as to His character, what He is like, what pleases Him and what displeases Him.

Can we, then, begin correctly? Does the evidence of God's existence as Creatorship so logically press upon the powers of reason that we can acknowledge it with a deep appreciation of His indescribable greatness? If so, then it becomes a confirming expectation to find direct statements throughout the Bible constantly

¹Psalm 148. 5 ²Genesis 1 ³II Timothy 3. 15-17; II Peter 1. 21; Hebrews 1.

affirming that there is no other God beside Him⁴—He is one⁵—who only has immortality (underived), dwelling in light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen, nor can see and live.⁶

THE OBJECT OF ALL CREATION

*'Glory to God in the highest'*⁷ captures in the simplest form the object of all creation. All the expenditures of power, all the manifestations of wisdom, the implementation of those necessary measures to prosper the ultimate conclusion of His purpose, can be summed up in the acclamations of praise and thankfulness ascribed to Him by those who have pleased Him.⁸ Their capacity to develop faith in God's promises and to exhibit the components of love, as Paul so beautifully defines them,⁹ will one day be weighed in the scales of Divine assessment. Those who are worthy will be rewarded by exaltation to a never-dying nature of angelic equality.¹⁰ Thus, our understanding of God must at once unite the unfolding of a pre-declared scenario in which God's glory is the primary objective, with the means by which He will bring about the permanent solution to the problem of man's present perishing nature of flesh and blood.

GOD IS LOVE

God is the pure source and fountain of love.¹¹ Because God first loved, we can also love.¹² We can be drawn by powerful motives to emulate this most conspicuous and gracious element of His character. The supreme human achievement is to reciprocate God's love. It is not verbal profession that counts, but the practical application of love towards those with whom we daily come in contact that measures the extent and genuineness of our faith.¹³

This is most evident when we look at Hebrews, chapter 11. Note verse 6,

'But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'

The chapter goes on to list certain men and women who are examples of those who, grown through the ages, have believed God to be what He has declared Himself to be, and who have been convinced that there is a great benefit in seeking Him. As we turn to the appropriate chapters in the Old Testament and read the details of their lives, it is obvious in each case that a commitment to faithfulness was not easy. It took faith and courage to continue. It took an unwavering conviction to believe that the final outcome of events affecting them would be one of vindicated wisdom. In trial they were confronted with temptation, but they continued in obedience and trust. Many times they suffered—so much about them seemed far removed from the fulfilment of their expectations. But how clearly the last two verses in the chapter show the real worth of their perseverance. Even though death overtook them,¹⁴ they died in full assurance that they would yet participate in a 'perfection' reserved for a future day.

⁷Isaiah 45. 5-7, 18; Isaiah 43. 10-13 ⁵Deuteronomy 6. 4, 5 ⁶1 Timothy 6. 15, 16
⁸Luke 2. 14 ⁸Revelation 7. 9-17 ⁹1 Corinthians 13. 4-8 ¹⁰Luke 20. 35, 36
¹¹John 4. 7, 8, 16 ¹²1 John 4. 10, 19 ¹³James 2. 14-26 ¹⁴Hebrews 11. 13

Through the lives of these people it becomes abundantly clear that God is presented to our view in the Bible not just as an Almighty Creator, but as one who lovingly and intimately relates to those who seek and trust Him. His love is seen in the establishment of carefully appointed ways by which men and women can be a part of something better than a few years of life followed by oblivion.¹⁵ What is this 'better thing' God has provided—summed up in the word 'perfection'?¹⁶

GOD APPOINTS THE WAY OF REDEMPTION

We might look carefully at the first few chapters of Genesis. They describe the formation of man from the dust of the ground. Instructions placed before him proclaimed the certainty of his return to that dust if he disobeyed the single restriction of his otherwise unfettered life.¹⁷ His subsequent disobedience brought upon him and his posterity the sentence of death. A principle began to operate in him and he became a dying creature. A return to the dust became his ultimate and inevitable destiny.¹⁸ In this tragic circumstance, however, we begin to see what God is like as a loving Heavenly Father. He immediately took pity and provided for their greatest need—a way out—covering for sin, so that they could lift up their heads and live before Him in hope.¹⁹ God provided a 'better thing', a 'better covering' than their own hands had made. Blood was shed as a lamb was slain.²⁰ Paul declares this to establish the vital principle that *'without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin'*.²¹

Here, then at the very beginning, the Bible teaches us what God is like. Kind, gracious, merciful, compassionate, forgiving—indeed, a God of love. This 'slain lamb' became a type of a perfect sacrifice²² in which God wrought through Jesus the clear demonstration of His love; and so it is written

'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'²³

Thus, the very essence of God can be understood in what He has done for us.

GOD—ABSOLUTELY RELIABLE

This 'better thing' God was providing was not to remain hidden in types and shadows. It needed to be developed, spelled out in ever-expanding detail so that as one generation succeeded another, certain historical facts would become supporting evidence, and predictions yet in the future would become the substance of their belief, faith and hope. There would be at all times the opportunity to look back and see the absolute reliability of God, and to look forward believing this same reliability would characterize the working out of all things to their final conclusion.²⁴ The fulfilment of God's promises is more certain than that the darkness of night will be followed by the coming dawn of tomorrow.²⁵

To be continued in the next issue.

¹⁵Romans 2. 6, 7

¹⁶Hebrews 11. 39, 40

¹⁷Genesis 2. 17

¹⁸Genesis 3. 22

¹⁹Genesis 3. 21

²⁰Revelation 13. 8

²¹Hebrews 9. 22

²²John 1. 29

²³John 3. 16

²⁴II Peter 1. 19-21

²⁵Jeremiah 33. 20, 25

The books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth

IMAGINE JOSHUA'S feelings! Moses, the great and revered leader, was dead! — he who had been for a whole generation God's oracle to Israel on all matters of conduct and legislation. Now the responsibility of launching the invasion into Canaan and of possessing its inhabitants rested heavily on him.¹ Not that he doubted for one moment God's power to give Israel the inheritance He had promised their ancestors — his early stand with Caleb bore eloquent witness to his faith;² rather it was the burden of exercising control over a wayward and rebellious nation. In the past the people had repeatedly challenged even Moses' authority³ and had frustrated, time and again, God's provision for their welfare. We can understand therefore why the book of Joshua begins with strong encouragement for the new leader. God assured him: *'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous . . .'*⁴ Taking that reassurance to heart, Joshua was successful in virtually all he undertook, and in this he is an example to every servant of God, who is offered the same Divine guarantee if only he or she will wholeheartedly rely on God's guidance.⁵

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The book of Joshua divides conveniently into halves: the first twelve chapters are concerned with the *conquest* of the Promised Land, the remainder with its *allotment* amongst the tribes of Israel. The first target in the campaign of conquest was the city of Jericho, just across the River Jordan from where Israel were encamped. Already the Canaanites in the land were terribly afraid, having heard how God had dried up the water of the Red Sea for His people forty years before; and only a year or two back two powerful Amorite kings had been soundly defeated.⁶ How much more intimidating would be the capture of the strongly fortified 'city of palm trees' (as Jericho was known), especially when it was preceded by another miraculous crossing of water, this time of the Jordan itself. These two events undoubtedly lowered further the morale of the remaining towns and helped to make them easy prey for the invading army.

THE FALL OF JERICO

To prepare for the siege of Jericho, Joshua sent out two spies to assess the situation and report back.⁷ They entered the city and lodged in the home of a woman named

Rahab, a harlot, who hid them from their enemies and enabled them to escape unharmed. In return they promised that she and her whole family would be spared when the city was taken.⁸ The narrative clearly reveals her faith in the power of Israel's God: a faith fully vindicated;⁹ she married into the tribe of Judah and became an ancestress of King David, and ultimately of a greater Joshua, Jesus (the Greek form of Joshua).

Next was the actual Jordan crossing,¹¹ the more remarkable because the river was in full spate from Hermon's snows in late spring. When at God's command the priests carrying the ark of the covenant waded into the river, its flow ceased, the water accumulating up-stream at a town called Adam; the whole nation then crossed the dried-up river, keeping a respectful distance from the ark. When the crossing was complete the priests brought up the ark from the river bed on to the west bank and the water immediately resumed its regular flow.¹² It is the only time in the Bible recorded when the steady descent of water ('Jordan' means descender) from 'Adam' to the Dead Sea has been interrupted. When we reflect that the ark represents Jesus,¹³ and this was Passover time,¹⁴ the incident becomes a plain foreshadowing of Christ's resurrection: the only occasion so far when a son of Adam has been delivered from death and made immortal.¹⁵

With the transfer of Israel to the west bank of the Jordan and their re-dedication to God's people in the Passover feast after circumcision of the younger generation, they were now poised to attack Jericho. Again God gave Joshua precise orders what to do: the army was to march once round the city each day for six days, escorting the ark. God as it was borne by the priests, with a further group of priests blowing rams' horns, they marched. On the seventh day the circuit was to be made seven times. This they did: the people gave a great shout—and Jericho's walls collapsed, making its capture a simple matter (modern archaeological excavations have shown that the walls collapsed from 'natural causes'—i.e. Divinely produced—and not by sappers undermining the foundations). Rahab and her family were brought out, but the rest of the city's inhabitants were killed—men, women and children—a pattern followed throughout Joshua's subsequent campaigns, in which a total of 31 cities were destroyed.¹⁷

DOES GOD APPROVE 'WHOLESALE SLAUGHTER'?

Moralists today take strong exception to the statements in this book that God ordered the destruction of the Canaanites.¹⁸ Many religious people contend that 'every soul is precious in God's sight'. Humanists also argue that all men and women have equal rights. Christians have been largely brainwashed into accepting these claims and seldom think to question them; it can easily be shown, however, that the Bible nowhere supports such attitudes. God's law in ancient Israel was that murderers, adulterers, idolaters and other evil-doers were to be put to death,¹⁹ and this is His mind throughout the Scriptures. As for the so-called 'sanctity of human life' (once men have corrupted God's way), one has only to ponder the implications of the flood God sent in Noah's day (for example),²⁰ or the destruction He inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah.²¹ These catastrophes must have wiped out millions; Jesus confirms their historic accuracy and

kes them the basis of stern warnings of comparable *future* judgments which he himself will impose when he returns to this earth.²² If this is far from the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' of popular hymns, it only goes to show how great is the gulf between enlightened human sentiment and God's righteous indignation over those who invert His laws.

With these and other Scriptural examples in mind, is it in any way 'out of character' that God should order Joshua to destroy a people notorious for all kinds of abominable customs? Some of these perversions are mentioned in various Old Testament passages and are summed up in the phrase '*the iniquity of the Amorites*';²³ a time had arrived in which they were to receive full retribution.

On the Israelites themselves a strict discipline was imposed. All the treasures of which they were to be '*devoted to God*',²⁴ so when Achan coveted and hid away some gold, silver and fine clothes in defiance of this law, not only he but also his whole family were put to death.²⁵ '*Our God is a consuming fire*'²⁶ is the New Testament reminder of an eternal truth—that God's laws are not to be trifled with, and presumptuous sinners will receive a short shrift (Ananias and Sapphira's fate is another such example).²⁷ This is the Bible's 'morality'—God's view of things, the one standpoint which really matters—not that wicked and ignorant men judge to be 'reasonable' conduct on the Almighty's part.

THE DIVISION OF THE LAND

The initial conquest of the land took seven years.²⁸ Then followed its division by lot into ten tribal areas, as described in chapters 14-19 (two and one half tribes had already received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan).²⁹ However, the tribe of Levi were not to possess a material allotment like the other tribes—*the Lord was their inheritance*.³⁰ Nevertheless they received 48 cities to live in, chosen from those assigned to the other tribes.³¹ In this way no area of ancient Israel was without priests or Levites near at hand to instruct the people in the laws of God given through Moses. Included in these 48 were six '*cities of refuge*' three on each side of the River Jordan, to which a man might flee for safety if he had killed a fellow Israelite accidentally.³²

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

This book follows on from 'Joshua' as the book of Joshua does from Deuteronomy, the difference in atmosphere is striking. Whereas in Joshua we are aware of effective leadership and example to the very last,³³ once Joshua died, together with the elders that outlived him, tribal behaviour and cohesion degenerated rapidly to a condition twice summed up in the bare statement: '*In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit*'.³⁴ Individual lawlessness was rife; community behaviour reflected this low standard. The book of Judges describes a **cycle** of events,³⁵ which was repeated again and again. First of all Israel turned to idolatry, the people neglecting the Lord and worshipping the false gods of the surrounding countries; next, God brought punishment upon them in the form of domination by another nation; thirdly, the people

cried out in the misery of their bondage and repented of their disloyalty; and finally God had pity on their plight and raised up for them a 'saviour', a military leader who threw off the foreign yoke, restored their freedom and thereafter acted as their 'judge' or ex-ruler. With the death of the judge the people relapsed into idolatry and the sad cycle was again followed.

In all, six such cycles are described, covering several centuries; the book named a total of twelve judges who ruled during this period; two more, Eli the priest and Samson the prophet, followed these, after which the monarchy began with Saul, a Benjaminite. Most of the book (about two-thirds of the unfolding history) is taken up with accounts of four judgeships—those of Deborah (with Barak), Gideon, Jephthah and Samson (the final chapters (17-21) consist of two appendices to the book proper, and belong chronologically to the earlier period). These four men are picked out in the lesson to the Hebrews as examples of outstanding faith in God's promises.³⁶

DEBORAH AND BARAK

Deborah was a prophetess in the hill country of Ephraim. She sent for Barak, of the tribe of Naphtali, to deliver Israel from Jabin, king of Hazor;³⁷ Hazor at this time was one of the powerful fortress cities of northern Israel (like many other cities mentioned in Judges, Hazor had been captured by Joshua, but was allowed by default to be retaken by surviving Canaanites).³⁸ Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, had a force of 900 chariots, but he was decisively defeated in a battle in which the elements (i.e. God's forces) nullified the apparent superiority of this mobile arm.³⁹ The ensuing song of victory in Chapter 5 graphically describes how Sisera himself was killed by a woman named Jael, addressed here as '*most blessed of women*'—like Mary, the mother of Jesus, centuries later.⁴⁰ Further Messianic overtones accompany Barak's achievement of taking captives from those who had formerly enslaved God's people.⁴¹

GIDEON

The next judge was Gideon, whose name means 'hewer'—in anticipation of his cutting down an idol grove or 'pole' (N.I.V.) in his home town in Manasseh.⁴² An angel appeared to him with the greeting: '*The Lord is with you, mighty warrior*'.⁴³ Entrusted with the task of freeing Israel from severe Midianite oppression, and encouraged by the miraculous signs, Gideon assembled an army from the nearby tribes. Their number was reduced to a token force by God's command, lest Israel should boast in their own prowess.⁴⁴ Victory was assured when the Midianites and their allies were induced to turn on one another—but not before Gideon had been granted a third sign, in which he overheard himself named as the victor by a soldier in the enemy camp.⁴⁵ Gideon's great triumph is yet another foretaste of the final destruction of Israel's foes on a future 'Day of Midian', predicted five centuries later by Isaiah;⁴⁶ the prophet identifies the latter-day 'hewer' as '*a rod out of the stem of Jesse*'⁴⁷—Jesus of Nazareth, who was forenamed 'Immanuel' ('God-with-us') by the same prophet.⁴⁸

JEPHTHAH AND SAMSON

Jephthah has gone down in history as the tragic figure who made a rash vow to God, that if he were given victory over the Ammonites (another oppressor of Israel),

ould devote to God whatever met him on his return home—and his daughter came out to greet him!⁴⁹ To his own hurt Jephthah kept his vow, earning the commendation of the psalmist writing much later.⁵⁰ We have here a sober reminder that any vow made to God MUST be kept, as Solomon also emphasises more than once.⁵¹

The last judge in the book is Samson,⁵² again a rather tragic figure. Chosen by God before his birth to fight for Israel against the Philistines, he nevertheless compromised his stand by his weakness for foreign women, who eventually brought about his downfall. Nevertheless his faith in God remained strong, and in his death he wiped out many more of Israel's foes than he had destroyed in his lifetime.⁵³ The efficacy of his death is again a veiled prophecy of a much greater achievement to follow—by God's 'strong man' (as Jesus is twice named in the Psalms);⁵⁴ through HIS death he destroyed 'him that had the power of death' and opened the way of deliverance for all them 'who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'.⁵⁵

THE TWO APPENDICES

As already stated, the two matters described in the final chapters of Judges belong to the earliest years, soon after Joshua's death. The first was in the time of Moses' grandson,⁵⁶ when an Ephraimite named Micah acquired an idol and adopted a young Levite to act as his priest. A group of Danites came across the private shrine, approved it and took it over for the whole tribe of Dan who were just then migrating northwards to new territory. Thus a complete tribe became transgressors against the **first** great commandment: '*Thou shalt have none other gods beside me*'.⁵⁷ Can it be only coincidental that the first sum of money mentioned in this appendix (1100 shekels) is the same figure as that offered as BETRAYAL money to Samson's wife in the previous chapter?⁵⁸

The second incident (chapters 19-21), which took place while Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, was still alive,⁵⁹ is most unsavoury; it closely parallels the intended crime of the men of Sodom which precipitated their destruction. To western readers the terrible fate of the unfortunate concubine stands out most prominently,⁶⁰ but to people in Bible lands the blackest spot was the gross neglect of hospitality to strangers,⁶¹ so much the unwritten code of the East. When called to account, the guilty citizens of Gibeon sought and obtained the support of THEIR tribe—Benjamin—in the affair, so we again have a whole tribe becoming accomplices, this time in breaking the **second** great commandment: '*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*'.⁶² When the other tribes went to war in order to punish their erring brothers, only 600 Benjamites survived.⁶³

THE BOOK OF RUTH

What a sad ending to Judges—two whole tribes astray on the most fundamental of the vine principles! But it is not really the end, for there is a **THIRD** appendix to the book, the beautiful story of Ruth, which also belongs to the days when the judges ruled.⁶⁴ The basic principles flouted by the two tribes are, in this little book, shown to be still faithfully observed by just a few godly individuals. The story itself, a mere four chapters,

can easily be read at a sitting. Note the qualities of character exhibited here, shining the brighter because of their contrast in Judges. In Ruth we have a widowed Moabite girl steadfastly turning her back on her own pagan nation and their gods, to put her trust wholeheartedly in the God of Israel;⁶⁵ yet humanly speaking she had no prospect of marrying again, especially into God's 'separate people'. Naomi, her mother-in-law, also appears as a stable, godly character, bowed but not broken by the series of calamities which had befallen her. Lastly we have the faithful and warmhearted Boaz of Bethlehem (a son of Rahab) helping Ruth to provide food for her mother-in-law, watching over her welfare and finally taking her as his wife. From this union sprang the immediate ancestors of David and therefore of Jesus, 'son of David'.⁶⁶ How delightful to find this small minority deeply concerned to put God's commands into practice in their daily lives!

There is a very searching lesson for us today from these records. All around us God's moral laws are being disobeyed and His standards disregarded—even by some who profess allegiance to the Bible. They may think God does not care or even notice, but these books show that He does—very much. *'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'*⁶⁷

Ruth became what Boaz and Naomi already were: Israelites in covenant relationship with God. We too must become related to God's 'new covenant' baptism into Christ—but thereafter our acceptability before Him depends on our keeping His commandments, like these few faithful people did so long ago.

J. H. Broughton

Pontesbury

REFERENCES

- ¹Joshua 1. 1-4 ²Numbers 14. 6-9 ³Deuteronomy 31. 27 ⁴Joshua 1. 5, 6 (N.I.V.)
⁵Hebrews 13. 5, 6 ⁶Joshua 2. 8-10, 24 ⁷Joshua 2. 1 ⁸Joshua 2. 12-14
⁹Joshua 2. 11; 6. 25; James 2. 25 ¹⁰Matthew 1. 5 ¹¹Joshua 3 ¹²Joshua 4. 18 ¹³Romans 3. 25
 (where J. N. Darby's translation has 'mercy seat' for 'propitiation') ¹⁴Joshua 5. 6
¹⁵Acts 2. 24-28; Hebrews 7. 16 ¹⁶Joshua 6 ¹⁷Joshua 12. 7-24 ¹⁸Joshua 5. 2; 8. 1, 2; 11. 15
¹⁹Exodus 21. 12; Leviticus 20. 10; Deuteronomy 17. 2-7 ²⁰Genesis 7. 1-10
²¹Genesis 19. 24, 25 ²²Luke 17. 26-30; II Thessalonians 1. 6-8
²³Leviticus 18. 24-30; Deuteronomy 18. 9-12; Genesis 15. 16 ²⁴Joshua 6. 19 ²⁵Joshua 6. 26
²⁶Hebrews 12. 29 ²⁷Acts 5. 1-11 ²⁸Joshua 14. 7-10 ²⁹Joshua 13 ³⁰Joshua 13. 27
³¹Joshua 1 ³²Joshua 20 ³³Joshua 23-24 ³⁴Judges 17. 6; 21. 25 (N.I.V.) ³⁵Judges 2. 11-14
³⁶Hebrews 11. 32 ³⁷Judges 4. 4-7 ³⁸cp Joshua 11. 10 ³⁹Judges 5. 20-22
⁴⁰Judges 5. 24; Luke 1. 42 ⁴¹Judges 5. 12; Psalm 68. 18; Ephesians 4. 8 ⁴²Judges 6. 25-27
⁴³Judges 6. 12 (N.I.V.) ⁴⁴Judges 7. 1-8 ⁴⁵Judges 7. 9-15 ⁴⁶Isaiah 9. 4; 10. 1-4
⁴⁷Isaiah 10. 33-34 ⁴⁸Isaiah 7. 14 ⁴⁹Judges 11. 30-35 ⁵⁰Judges 11. 39; Psalm 15. 1-4
⁵¹Proverbs 20. 25; Ecclesiastes 5. 4-6 ⁵²Judges 13. 1-16 ⁵³Judges 16. 1-31
⁵⁴Psalm 80. 17-19; 10. 5 ⁵⁵Hebrews 2. 14-15 (R.V.) ⁵⁶Judges 17. 1-5
⁵⁷Exodus 20. 3 (R.V. margin) ⁵⁸Judges 17. 2; 16. 6 ⁵⁹Judges 20. 27-28 ⁶⁰Judges 20. 4-6
⁶¹Judges 19. 15, 22 ⁶²Leviticus 19. 18 ⁶³Judges 20. 47 ⁶⁴Ruth 1. 1 ⁶⁵Ruth 1. 16; 2. 1-16
⁶⁶Ruth 4. 17; Matthew 1. 1, 5 ⁶⁷James 1. 27 (N.I.V.)

The parable of the leaven

THE SURPASSING NATURE of the message of hope brought by Jesus to perishing humanity posed a continuing problem. How could he possibly communicate, within the limitations of human speech, the details of a quality of life totally outside the experience of his hearers? He had been commissioned by God, his Father, to preach the gospel—the good news of a divine system of government that would benefit every member of the human race. All the superlatives of earthly language could not adequately express the wonder and glory of this heavenly state to be brought to the earth. Consequently we find that Jesus was constantly saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like this . . . like that’. Using the figure of speech of the parable he said, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed; like leaven; like treasure hid in a field; like a merchant man seeking goodly pearls; like a net’. By pointing the minds of his contemporaries to things with which they were familiar, they could begin to get a glimpse of the wonderful blessings that God has in store for those who are obedient to His commands.

THE USE OF LEAVEN

Meaning is fundamental, and understanding vital—never more so than when we are dealing with those things that affect our eternal destiny. What, then, did Jesus mean when he said, ‘*The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened*’?¹ He is drawing on the familiar, everyday picture of the preparation that is necessary for the baking of bread, and is saying that in some respect the kingdom of heaven is like the leaven used in this process.

Matthew 13. 33

The Greek word translated leaven is *zume*, from the root word *zeo*, meaning to or bubble up, to seeth, and, in relation to solids, to glow, to be hot. This meaning is a reflection of the Hebrew word *chamets*, translated leaven and used most frequently in the Old Testament. The other word translated leaven in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *seor*, which carries the idea of remnants of that which is left over, possibly referring to old dough, which was kneaded into the next lot of flour (meal) and water so that it could be leavened and baked to produce a further supply of bread.

Dough baked without the addition of an agent of fermentation results in a heavy, unpalatable bread. Yeast, a unicellular plant, contains an enzyme that can break down starch into sugar, that in turn can be broken down into carbon dioxide, water and alcohol, releasing energy for reproduction. The bubbles of gas aerate the whole mass of dough, causing it to rise. When it has reached the required size, it must be put into the oven, with an initially high temperature, to ensure the yeast is killed, thus preventing further production of carbon dioxide, the overstretching of the gluten in the flour, the consequent collapse of the loaf. There are various raising agents, among which are sodium bicarbonate, acid sodium pyrophosphate, acid calcium phosphate, eggs, and in some circumstances, vinegar.

Leaven, then, is an agent of change, capable of hastening the process of corruption, or, in conjunction with heat, instrumental in producing something that will sustain life, e.g. a loaf of bread. Either way it is a very active substance that affects the whole lump of dough, for evil or for good.

THE PASSOVER

To arrive at a correct understanding of any passage in the Bible it is essential to study it in the context of the whole of Scripture. Clearly there was nothing intrinsically wrong with the use of leaven. Under the law of Moses its use was only forbidden by God on special occasions, and under certain circumstances specifically laid down. For example, at the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt, God commanded them to observe a certain ritual that, if faithfully carried out, would ensure their preservation from the final plague in which the angel of death would slay all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.

A male lamb without any physical blemish had to be sacrificed, its flesh roasted with fire, and eaten the same evening with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. As the children of Israel would have to leave Egypt at a moment's notice, it would leave no time for leavened bread to be prepared, as it takes time to rise. But there was more than that. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul directs our minds to the real meaning of all the Mosaic ritual. All the things that happened to Israel were types designed by God to teach us about the spiritual realities they represented.

In writing to the believers at Corinth, when speaking of the keeping of the Lord's supper he says, '*For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.*'² The immediate

²1 Corinthians 5. 7

PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

text of this statement is enlightening. The Apostle is upbraiding the believers at Corinth for countenancing a case of incest in their midst, and his choice of language is significant,

'And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.'³

Their minds were blown up with pride and boasting, and so the Apostle continues, 'Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?'⁴

The Apostle was warning that just as a little piece of leaven would work its way through the whole mass of dough, so one sinful person left unchecked in their midst could adversely affect the whole assembly. He therefore urges them to take the appropriate action,

'Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.'⁵

We recall that it was while Jesus was celebrating the Passover feast with his disciples that he took bread and wine and, imparting a new meaning to them, shared the emblems of his body and blood, commanding his followers to do this until he should come again. So the Apostle Paul continues, '*Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*'.⁶

It is clear, then, that the exclusion of the use of leaven from the Passover celebration was to point to the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is testified he was '*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners*',⁷ and that he '*knew no*'⁸

OTHER EXAMPLES

King David makes his plea to God, '*Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the righteous and cruel man*'⁹ (Hebrew for cruel—*chamets*—literally 'leavened'). Again it is clear that leaven is representative of sin—that corrupting influence that eventually brings about death; for we are told by the Apostle Paul, when writing to the Romans, '*The wages of sin is death*'.¹⁰ The human mind, undisciplined by the word of God, easily boils up—gets into a ferment, and manifests itself in evil deeds. It was particularly evident in the time of Noah, for the record says, '*The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence*'.¹¹ (Hebrew *chamas*, from same root as *chamets*, leavened.) This picture of the world of Noah's day is one of turmoil and wicked ferment, affecting everybody except Noah and his family.

³1 Corinthians 5. 2 ⁴1 Corinthians 5. 6 ⁵1 Corinthians 5. 7

⁶1 Corinthians 5. 8 ⁷Hebrews 7. 26 ⁸II Corinthians 5. 21

⁹Psalm 71. 4 ¹⁰Romans 6. 23 ¹¹Genesis 6. 11

Again, it was King David who was concerned because *'false (Hebrew char- witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not'*.¹² These evil were leavened—motivated by corrupt values.

Another classic occasion when Jesus spoke of the symbolism of leaven was when his disciples had forgotten to get a supply of bread. Jesus said unto them, *'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees'*.¹³ The disciples, however, could only reason at the lower, physical level of literal bread. It was not until Jesus had further explained to them that they could see the meaning of the analogy. *'Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees'*.¹⁴

The Pharisees were puffed up with self-righteousness and the Sadducees, another Jewish sect, denied the resurrection and the existence of angels. In writing to Timothy the Apostle Paul warned how false doctrine would subvert the minds of those who heed to it, to their eventual downfall. By contrast he exhorts,

*'Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.'*¹⁵

A WARNING FOR US

Throughout the Bible we are constantly warned of the importance of choosing the right type of food for our mind. Wrong teaching will lead us to an eternal grave, but good, wholesome doctrine of the holy scriptures will lead us to eternal life to be enjoyed in the Kingdom of God. God's plan for our planet earth and its inhabitants is the total and total eradication of sin, evil, corruption and death.

Let us pause at this point to consider an apparent anomaly that the foregoing scripture teaching presents. In every instance where leaven is spoken of, it is a symbol of sin and corruption—that is, every instance except one which is recorded in the gospel records, Matthew 13. 33, and Luke 13. 21. This one exception came from the lips of the greatest teacher of spiritual truth, from Christ himself;

'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened'.¹⁶

Everything about God's kingdom is good and beneficial, so why did Christ make this comparison with leaven? Let us remind ourselves of some of the characteristics of leaven. If hidden in a mass of unpalatable, indigestible dough, it has the ability to

¹²Psalm 35. 11 ¹³Matthew 16. 6 ¹⁴Matthew 16. 12

¹⁵II Timothy 2. 15-18 ¹⁶Matthew 13. 33

quickly, unseen and effectively, throughout the whole mass, causing it to rise, grow, and become light, and with the application of heat to be transformed into a more permanent state that is pleasant to the palate, and capable of sustaining life.

THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE

It is in these respects that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven. Jesus went everywhere telling people the good news about God's kingdom. His words, unseen, became hidden in the minds of those seeking the way to eternal life and incorruptibility, where it worked effectually, totally transforming their method of thinking and way of life. All such were continually rising to a new and better life, disciplined by the word of God, enabling them to '*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*'.¹⁷ All who are so enlightened and affected by God's commands will develop characters wellpleasing to Him. Just as the remnants of leaven are destroyed in the final firing process and the required state of the bread is fixed, so, too, at the spiritual level we are promised that, if faithful, our sinful, death-stricken nature will be changed to that which is permanent and indestructible—immortality. The Apostle Paul speaks of this transformation when writing to the Corinthians:

'Behold, I shew you a mystery (i.e. something hidden, but capable of being known): We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.'¹⁸

What then is our wisdom?

'is good to be zealously' (Greek *zeloo*, from the same root *zeo*, meaning fervent, as the word *zume* meaning leaven) '*affected always in a good thing*'.¹⁹

T. G. Kemp
Bromley

¹⁷1 Peter 3. 18 ¹⁸1 Corinthians 15. 51-54 ¹⁹Galatians 4. 18

BIBLE READING TABLES

MARCH

1	Lev.	5, 6	Psa.	105	1 Cor.	14
2		7		106		15
3		8		107		16
4		9, 10		108, 109	2 Cor. 1,	2
5		11		110, 112		3, 4
6		12, 13		113, 114		5, 6, 7
7		14		115, 116		8, 9
8		15		117, 118		10, 11
9		16		119, v. 40		12, 13
10		17, 18		v. 41-80	Luke	1
11		19		v. 81-128		2
12		20		v. 129-176		3
13		21		120, 124		4
14		22		125, 127		5
15		23		128, 130		6
16		24		131, 134		7
17		25		135, 136		8
18		26		137, 139		9
19		27		140, 142		10
20	Num.	1		143, 144		11
21		2		145, 147		12
22		3		148, 150		13, 14
23		4	Proverbs	1		15
24		5		2		16
25		6		3		17
26		7		4		18
27		8, 9		5		19
28		10		6		20
29		11		7		21
30		12, 13		8, 9		22
31		14		10		23

APRIL

1	Num.	15	Proverbs	11	Luke	2
2		16		12	Gal.	1,
3		17, 18		13		3,
4		19		14		5,
5		20, 21		15	Eph.	1,
6		22, 23		16		3,
7		24, 25		17		5,
8		26		18	Phil.	1,
9		27		19		3,
10		28		20	John	
11		29, 30		21		2,
12		31		22		
13		32		23		
14		33		24		
15		34		25		
16		35		26		
17		36		27		9, 11
18	Deut.	1		28		11
19		2		29		11
20		3		30		13, 11
21		4		31		15, 11
22		5	Eccles.	1		17, 11
23		6, 7		2		11
24		8, 9		3		20, 2
25		10, 11		4	Acts	
26		12		5		
27		13, 14		6		3,
28		15		7		5,
29		16		8		
30		17		9		

To: M. J. Walker, 15 Brentfield Road, Dartford, Kent, England

Please send me a free copy of:

"IS THERE A GOD?"

which gives further details on the 2-part subject beginning on page 1

Name

Address

I am/am not interested in receiving further particulars of the free Bible Correspondence Course.

The Christadelphians
believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments)
to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God.
Its principal theme is the setting up of the
Kingdom of God on earth under the rulership of Jesus Christ.
LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD is devoted to promoting a
better understanding of this true Christian hope.

*

The Secretary (see front of booklet) will be pleased
to arrange for LIGHT to be posted, without charge,
to any address on request.

*

The Christadelphians will be pleased to answer questions
on matters of Bible teaching either privately or in
the pages of LIGHT, and correspondence will be welcomed.
Letters should be addressed to the Correspondence Editor,
57 Longmead Drive, Sidcup, Kent, DA14 4NT England.
If a letter is intended for publication, please write
on one side of the paper only.

*

Information about public meetings arranged by
the Christadelphians in particular areas and the names
of the nearest Christadelphian representatives
can be had on request.

